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BROADBAND IN RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

SUBMISSION REGARDING KEY ISSUES REPORT NO 54/1 – MARCH 2008

Thank you for the opportunity to provide further comments regarding Broadband in Rural and Regional Communities. A detailed submission has not been prepared in this instance, particularly due to the time which was spent preparing the first submission.

Technology of equal quality and capacity, such as broadband, must be made available to rural and regional communities if we are to attract capital investment and employment opportunities equal to those in urban areas. Further, if we are to retain and attract skilled young people, we need to provide technology equivalent to that available in cities.

High export prices for agricultural products and for mineral resources are fuelling economic growth in regional areas due to direct and indirect flow-on effects. Service industries, including technology and communications, however provide a far greater contribution to Australia's GDP than primary industries. If technology available in rural and regional areas is at least equal to that available in urban areas, we will be able to build on this growth potential through the ability to attract service industries to regional areas.

The following are examples of ways in which the key issues summarised in the Executive Summary of the Discussion Paper may be addressed:

- Lack of availability of services:
 - continue to provide the assistance package for isolated residents
 - continuation of the upgrade program for rural exchanges
 - reduction in the cost of broadband to people in rural and regional areas, particular by Telstra.

- Role of State Government:
 - Training in use of broadband technology in local communities.
 - Integration of government agencies, and maintenance of offices in rural areas.

- State and Local Government Planning:
 - State to assist with web hosting initiatives such as Eplanning and LocalE by offering these free of charge or at reduced cost to Local Government.
 - Linkages between websites, compliance tools etc to maximize efficiencies
- Importance of broadband to business and population levels – refer to first submission
- Level of service required to maximize benefits to these communities - equivalent to that available to metropolitan users.

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